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Editorial

As we prepare this edition of our Journal, we are anticipating the hosting of the Czech Rectors' Conference (CRC) at IBTS. In organising a presentation on the work of IBTS to the CRC, my colleagues have pointed out the importance of explaining who Baptists are to the Rectors of the large Czech State Universities, especially in a country where Baptists have no profile – that we are not some strange sect, but a major Christian world communion belonging to the one true catholic, orthodox and apostolic church. This is a constant work of apologetics for Baptists. When the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) was founded in 1905, those assembled recited the Apostles' Creed together to place Baptists in the mainstream of Christianity. This task is ever with us. In 2005, at the BWA Centenary Congress, a message was issued with the same apologetic task. A longer version of that message, with an eschatological thrust, had been prepared by a special international committee over a period of two years. In this issue I seek to describe the process in preparing such a message, the longer version of which is also published here. It deserves reflection and comment within our baptistic communities and across the wider Christian family.

One key theme of the Congress Message is the missionary task of baptistic communities. However, some territorial churches look at this missionary and evangelistic task as 'proselytism'. This is a controversial area of debate within ecumenical circles and Darrell Jackson, who has worked with the Conference of European Churches in the area of mission, explores this issue, especially in relationship to the Orthodox churches.

The Congress Message focuses on our calling as disciples of Jesus and we know that the community of disciples drew away from their own biological families to form an intentional community of faith. Our contemporary gathering churches often develop a form of being which emphasises the place of the so-called nuclear family. Enoch Šaba explores the wisdom of this, given that so many of our communities have a significant proportion of members who do not belong to conventional nuclear families, and Christ himself asks provocative questions about the narrow definition of family over against the gathering intentional community of disciples.

The Revd Dr Keith G Jones

Rector, IBTS

The Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Identity:

A Reflection on the Journey to the Centenary Congress Message, 2005

Introduction

From the foundation of the Baptist World Alliance¹ in 1905 until today the world Baptist family has held periodic congresses at which there has been some form of keynote address or message from the Congress to the whole Baptist family. In 1905, at the first gathering in London, Dr Alexander McLaren, the famous Baptist preacher from Union Chapel, Manchester, invited the whole gathering to recite with him the Apostles' Creed as a way of demonstrating to the Christian World Communions² that Baptists belonged to the mainstream of Christian life and were not some form of sect, as certain people beyond the Baptist family had claimed.

Reflecting on these two ideas – the value of a message from those assembled in congress and the importance McLaren attached to making clear that Baptists belonged to the orthodox Christian family – the officers of the BWA decided on two initiatives for the Centenary Congress in 2005. The first was to place within the opening session of the Congress a reading by the participants of the Apostles' Creed, as had been done in 1905 and 1955. The 1955 reading had been led by an African-American and the Congress Worship Committee proposed the 2005 leading of the recitation of the creed be done by an actor playing the part of McLaren, who set the scene; an African-American woman; and, in dramatic form, by a young man from the United Kingdom with learning difficulties (who is an active and committed member of his local Baptist Church). These three people, in representative fashion, affirmed both the historical 'length' and the participatory 'breadth' of the world Baptist family.

The process of preparing the Message

Beyond that, the BWA Resolutions Committee was augmented³ and in 2002 charged with the task of producing a message from the Centenary

¹ Hereafter BWA. The history of the BWA is found in R.V. Pierard, gen. ed., *Baptists Together in Christ 1905-2005: A hundred-year history of the Baptist World Alliance* (Falls Church, V: Samford University Press, 2005).

² The Christian World Communions, as they are now called, represent the major mainstream Christian denominational families in the world such as the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed and Pentecostal. On this see R.V. Pierard 'The Christian World Communions - Ecumenism on a Global Scale' in Anthony R. Cross, ed., *Ecumenism and History: Studies in honour of John H. Y. Briggs* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002) and J.H.Y. Briggs, 'Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement', in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. six, No. 1, September 2005, pp 11-17.

³ This was done in accordance with BWA Bye-Law XII.2.

Congress to the Baptist family throughout the world. The BWA Congress Resolutions Committee⁴ was tasked with the responsibility of ensuring this message challenged Baptists in their worship, life and mission and was also usable as a contemporary statement of what Baptists believe.

The Committee was given no financial resources to do its work, to hold meetings outside of the limited scope of the BWA General Council meetings, or to hold seminars or conferences to explore with a representative range of Baptist leaders what such a word to Baptist people might include, and how it might seek to set out a contemporary statement of what Baptists believe, which was also true to the historic understanding of Anabaptist and Baptist communities.⁵ Therefore, the BWA Congress Resolutions Committee agreed to spend extensive time at each BWA General Council in 2002, 2003 and 2004 working on the Congress Message.⁶ Additionally, it was agreed that versions of the message would be circulated by email amongst the members of the group between General Council meetings to advance and refine the manuscript. From the beginning, the BWA Congress Resolutions Committee sought to work with members from every continent.⁷ Without financial resources from the BWA, some from Asia and Africa could not participate as they wished, but as Chair of this enterprise I did my best to encourage the participation of all in the exercise through emails.

At the outset it was suggested by the officers of the BWA that the BWA Congress Message of 1923 at the Stockholm Congress might be used as a base. The Officers also commented, and the Resolutions Committee agreed, that there should also be a repeat of the use of the Apostles' Creed, as had happened at the 1905 Congress. So, by the BWA Council meeting of 2004 a draft message existed based upon the 'model' of the Stockholm Message of 1923 and also incorporating some themes from the London Message of 1955. At the meeting in Seoul, Korea, in July 2004, a dramatic shift in thinking occurred when Nigel G. Wright, Principal of Spurgeon's

⁴ The BWA *Centenary Congress Official Report* (Falls Church, Va: BWA, 2006) unfortunately, whilst listing all other committees associated with the Congress, fails to mention this Congress Message Committee and its membership and only publishes the derived shorter BWA Congress Message.

⁵ After the Congress Resolutions Committee began its work, a group led by Curtis Freeman, and consisting of others in the USA, asked the BWA to initiate just such a process of making sure a message with doctrinal content was offered at the Congress. This was seen as urgent by them because of the prevalent situation within former BWA member, the Southern Baptist Convention. However, the BWA officers had previously set this work in hand, predating the initiative of Curtis and his colleagues.

⁶ Notes of these meetings are contained within an archive of the BWA Congress Resolutions Committee 2000-2005, IBTS Archives, Prague, Czech Republic.

⁷ To illustrate this, amongst those serving in addition to BWA Vice Presidents were **Asia:** Ken Manley, Chu-Wood Ping, Tony Cupit; **Africa:** Dorothy Selebano, Douglas Waruta; **South America:** Raoul Scialabba; **Caribbean:** Ken Cadette, Neville Callam; **North America:** G Elaine Smith, Dick Pierard, Roy Medley, Donald C. Brown, Bob Shaw, Bob Terry, Ian M. Chapman; **Europe:** Nigel G. Wright, Hans Guderian, Keith G. Jones.

College, suggested that the content be re-cast from an eschatological perspective, which set aside the Stockholm and London templates. He argued, successfully as far as the Committee was concerned, that the purpose of the church is to help people see their way towards what God intends in His Kingdom, and that a more dynamic message could be produced if we worked from a vision of what God ultimately intends, asking the question, what sort of people, what sort of church of Jesus Christ, is needed to take us on that journey. Thus, in 2004, a strategic move was made by the Committee to break with past formularies for the production of such messages and engage with this new dynamic.

The content of the Message analysed

So, after the positioning of the opening paragraph – the event and the people⁸ – the immediate move was to a statement about the Kingdom of God⁹ and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The forward thrust towards the vision of the new heaven and the new earth¹⁰ was set within the vision of the completion of creation as God intends. From this a statement about the ‘true Church’ under the Lordship of Jesus Christ placed Baptists firmly in the historic community of mainstream Christians, making the assertion that in the present shape of the Christian world, no one Christian world family can claim to be the only true church.¹¹

This strategic document thus calls Baptist people to go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit, anticipating God calling us to new tasks and possibilities. The approach mirrors the attitude of some of the early Baptists who regularly affirmed that God ‘has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word’.¹²

From this eschatological vision, the description of the church as a ‘gathering community of believers’ affirming the historical evangelical Gospel, was declared. Here, it is important to notice the deliberate change of an historic formulary. Traditional Baptist theologians and scholars have written about the ‘gathered church’. However, as I have argued

⁸ BWA Centenary Congress, Birmingham, England, 2005.

⁹ See below for the text of the longer ‘eschatological message’.

¹⁰ Revelation 21: 1,2.

¹¹ This claim might be considered to have been made by the Roman Catholic Church, most recently in the document ‘The One True Church’ published by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On a Catholic criticism of this stance see Christa Pongratz-Lippitt ‘Cardinal criticises “One True Church” document’, *The Tablet* (London, 6th October 2007).

¹² See the hymn by George Rawson, ‘We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind’, *Baptist Praise and Worship*, no. 107 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). This is based on notes taken by Edward Winslow describing the address by Congregationalist John Robinson to those who were leaving his congregation at Leyden to sail with the Pilgrim Fathers in the ship, *The Mayflower*, in 1620.

elsewhere,¹³ gathering communities are porous at the edges¹⁴ and more dynamically engaged in mission.¹⁵ This understanding was adopted by the Resolutions Committee as more appropriate to the drive of the full statement. Of course, it was queried by some scholars of a previous generation, but the Committee held firm to its intent. The document also clearly challenged the jibe made by some liturgists from other traditions that Baptists are hyper-Zwinglian, believing almost in the ‘real absence’ of Christ at the Eucharist. This type of attack has been untrue both to Zwingli¹⁶ and to Baptists,¹⁷ but here in the Centenary Message the world Baptist community sought to dispose of this old calumny once and for all. The document also diverts away from the emphasis on the so-called notion of Baptist ‘autonomy’, beloved of some Baptist writers in the southern states of the USA.¹⁸

The reference to the scriptures stays firmly with the most common form of wording used by evangelicals and the Lausanne Covenant.¹⁹ The document goes on to firmly disown the idea of the ‘independent baptist’, surely an oxymoron! From the first until last, *true* Baptists have affirmed *interdependency* and rejected the idea of the ‘independent’ congregation as untrue to the New Testament and not a part of Baptist history and tradition.²⁰ The BWA Centenary Message goes on to list the important reports of dialogue with other major world communions, a reminder that this eschatological trajectory understands that there is a ‘larger’ Christian world than the Baptist World Alliance.

The section on ‘baptism’ and the eucharist affirms the covenanted nature of Baptist communal life and is, again, a statement contradictory to those who have mistakenly argued that believers’ baptism is a personal affirmation of faith in Jesus alone and not part of a wider experience of being baptised into the faith of the community, and that the drive forward of that activity is firstly in the gracious act of God in Christ. Baptism is baptism into Christ and into the missional community of the church, where

¹³ Keith G. Jones, *A Believing Church: Learning from some Contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist Perspectives* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998). The approach outlined here has also been taken up by Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists: New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002).

¹⁴ Keith G. Jones, ‘On Abandoning Public Worship’, in Keith G. Jones and Parush R. Parushev, eds., *Currents in Baptist Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: IBTS, 2007) pp. 7-23.

¹⁵ Keith G. Jones, ‘Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*’, in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. four, No. 2, January 2004.

¹⁶ H.W.W. Pipkin, *Zwingli: The Positive Religious Values of his Eucharistic Writings* (Leeds: Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1985).

¹⁷ Keith G. Jones, *A Shared Meal and a Common Table* (Oxford: Whitley Publications 1999).

¹⁸ For a contemporary criticism of this notion see William H. Brackney, ‘An Historical Theologian Looks Anew at Autonomy’. Paper delivered to a BWA Consultation on Baptist Ecclesiology, Elstal, Germany, March 2007, <http://www.bwanet.org/default.aspx?pid=499>, accessed 15 October 2007.

¹⁹ Lausanne Covenant, See <http://www.lausanne.org/>, accessed 11 October 2007.

²⁰ See Keith G. Jones, ‘Rethinking Baptist Ecclesiology’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. one, No. 1, September 2000, pp 4-18.

all have gifts and all have ministries. The baptised are called to participate in local and cross-cultural mission that the world might believe. As Oncken proclaimed over one hundred years ago ‘every Baptist a missionary!’²¹ Naturally, whilst making clear Baptists generally do not take a view of tight ‘orders’ of ministry, this does not mean that the gathering community fails to call out individuals to specific service, including separated service, as pastors, missionaries, teachers, evangelists and so on. Within the world family the titles, recognition and commissioning given to those so called, varies immensely.

The 2005 Centenary Message also re-affirms the Baptist commitment to religious liberty and human rights for women and men.²² The statement, perhaps, goes beyond its predecessors in calling upon Baptist communities to help create a culture of peace. Whilst it cannot be argued that Baptists have historically belonged within the classic peace church tradition of the Quakers and Mennonites, nevertheless, in more recent times, there has been a renewed interest in this topic by many Baptists in the world.²³ The challenge to peacemaking facing Baptists has been highlighted in recent years by the experience of Professor Norman Kember, a British Baptist, who served as a ‘peacemaker’ in Iraq and spent time as a hostage, only to be vilified on his release by British Army General, Sir Michael Jackson, for his peacemaking stance.²⁴

Again, this Centenary Message is clear about the involvement of believers in a mission which has care and compassion, both deed and word, within its compass. There have been times and places when Baptists have been constrained from active involvement in care for the outcast, the widow, the stranger – so-called diaconal ministries – as, for instance, Baptists in eastern Europe under the oppression of communism. However, this is not our natural stance. Engagement in the world, concern to be good stewards of the created order, a prophetic voice to the political structures, are of the nature of the believing communities and affirmed in this document. Billy Graham, Martin Luther King Jnr and Jimmy Carter are examples from this first century of the BWA of those who have embraced a holistic message and lifestyle.

²¹ ‘Jeder Baptist ein Missionar’. Ian M. Randall ‘Pious wishes: Baptists and wider renewal movements in nineteenth-century Europe’, *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 7, July 2000, p. 321.

²² One of the first such calls in the English language was made by Thomas Helwys in 1612. On the theological undergirding of this, see Brian Haymes, ‘On Religious Liberty: re-reading *A short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* in London in 2005’, *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 42, July 2007, pp. 197-217. See also <http://www.ibts.eu/research/thomas-helwys-institute>, accessed 11 October 2007.

²³ For an important Baptist contribution to the debate see Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: ten strategies for abolishing war* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1998). See also Paul Dekar, *For the Healing of the Nations: Baptist Peacemakers* (Macon, Georgia: Smythe and Helwys, 1993).

²⁴ Norman Kember, *Hostage in Iraq* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007).

Some outside the tradition have a view that Baptists disavow learning and study in the leadership of the church, preferring the charisma of gifting. Certainly, Baptists highly value calling and gifting, but the place of formation and education are warmly affirmed within the Centenary Message. In Europe, home of the oldest institution for Baptist theological education in the world,²⁵ since the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, we have seen an explosion of centres of theological education by Baptist Unions, and these institutions work together in developing criteria of excellence and sharing resources.²⁶

Ending, where previous BWA Congress messages have started, this eschatological message comes back to some of the ancient creeds of the church and also to statements of the BWA on mission, evangelism and church planting, against racism, and on the deep value of Christian worship. All make clear the comprehensive understanding of the calling to follow Jesus Christ in authentic Christocentric discipleship.

Conclusion

The 'longer' message²⁷ was refined through twelve major versions and from that was drawn a shorter 'Message',²⁸ shared in the BWA Centenary Congress and with the churches. The 'longer' message, reprinted in full below, was circulated to Baptist Unions and seminaries and has been taken up in many places to form the basis of a curriculum on Baptist identity, or for classes on contemporary baptistic theology and ecclesiology. As I have sought to demonstrate, it is a very dynamic and forward-oriented document which has sought to address criticisms of Baptists by those who have failed to understand us properly. It does not claim to be more than what it is – a message to the people called Baptists at a particular moment in time – but in its depth and comprehensiveness it repays careful study and reflection, not only in the setting of academia, but in the gathering communities, associations and unions who make up our European Baptist family.

Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS, Prague

²⁵ Bristol Baptist College, claiming a foundation date of 1679.

²⁶ See <http://www.cebts.eu/>, accessed 11 October, 2007.

²⁷ The Mennonite World Conference General Council adopted a much shorter statement on 15 March 2006 at Pasadena, California. However, this short document of 'Shared Convictions' is not meant to replace the official confessions of faith of the conferences of the member bodies, no more than is the BWA Congress Message. For the text see <http://www.mwc-cmm.org/MWC/councils.html>, accessed 15 October 2007.

²⁸ Keith G. Jones, 'The Baptist World Alliance: Message from the Centenary Congress', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. six, No. 1, September 2005, pp. 45-48.

Commentary and Discussion Document based on the Message from the Centenary Congress, Birmingham, United Kingdom, July 2005

To Baptist sisters and brothers throughout the world

1. The Centenary Baptist World Congress meeting in Birmingham, England, July 2005, represents Baptist believers from throughout the world – a family of 30 million baptized believers and many millions of friends, adherents and children. Conscious of the many challenges facing our world in the early years of this 21st century and recalling 100 years of Baptist solidarity throughout the world through the Baptist World Alliance, this Congress seeks to affirm those key insights of Baptist identity which were declared in the inaugural session of the BWA 100 years ago in London.

The Kingdom of God, our hope and our prayer

2. In the Bible, God's Holy Word, we are promised a New Heaven and a New Earth. These are the present and yet to come eternal reign of God, towards which He calls us in the power of the Holy Spirit. They represent God's eternal Kingdom marked by peace, justice and righteousness. This Kingdom is no less than the completion of the creation in every way as God intends it to be. God's Kingdom comes by His power and grace through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and is not of human design or construction (Revelation 21).

The True Church and the Lordship of Jesus Christ

3. No Christian tradition is the complete expression of the true church. We believe the true church is that company of all people and tribes and tongues that will stand before God at the last and be invited into God's everlasting Kingdom. It is an eschatological community that God continues to gather to himself. The church as known today is a genuine expression of that universal gathering of all those who through all ages will have been gathered by the Spirit through Christ to the Father in order that God may be all in all to them. While eagerly anticipating that great eschatological moment, we acknowledge that the church in every age is called to proclaim that Kingdom in word and deed, demonstrating a new humanity created in Christ Jesus and a rich koinonia as a sign of God's presence among all believers throughout the world (Acts 1.6-14).

A calling into the future

4. Assembled from many peoples and nations in the BWA Centenary Congress 2005, we renew our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, our guide, our friend, and we open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit to kindle our faith, renew our hope and empower us to participate in God's passion and compassion for God's creation (Acts 2. 1-22).

A koinonia of the committed

5. We are gathering communities of believers who seek to echo the real, but mysterious, love of the Triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We joyously witness to the fact that God in Christ, the crucified, risen, ascended and glorified one, has loved and, by his atoning death on the cross, has reconciled to Himself all who believe in Him. In faith we gratefully respond to God's love. In baptism we publicly celebrate our relationship to Christ and our intention to follow his leading. In the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, we celebrate the real presence of Christ in our midst (Acts 2.43-47).
6. We understand our goal as a fellowship of believers to be a sign of what God intends as we worship Him and seek to share in His mission. We see the vision of all that God intends in outline and we desire to go forward together with others. We believe that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the supreme authority for us in all matters of faith and practice as we journey forward together.
7. We declare that the divinely inspired Old and New Testament Scriptures have supreme authority as the written Word of God and are fully trustworthy for faith and conduct (2 Timothy 15-17).

Forward into unity

8. In our journey as Christ-followers and always open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we join with all who believe that there is 'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism'. We seek to be obedient to the plea of our crucified, risen and ascended Lord that his friends 'may all be one'. (John 17.20-24).
9. We understand that through the Holy Spirit we experience interdependence with those who share this dynamic discipleship of the church as the people of God, whom God is always drawing forward into deeper relationship and mission.
10. Here is our unity. It is both God's gift to us and what God demands of us. It is no static thing, but is present by the dynamic of the Holy Spirit

as individuals are confronted by Christ and believe, repent and are baptized. We are called out with others in such churches that Christ is gathering. These, in turn are interdependent with other such churches in associations, unions, conventions, regional federations and in the Baptist World Alliance (Acts 15).

11. Unity does not mean uniformity. Even among those who agree on the essentials of the Christian life as understood by Baptists, there are differences on non-essential matters such as worship style, church life, missions and ministry models. Often times these differences reflect the various cultures and histories of local believers.
12. We also recognise others within the Christian World Communions who share many attitudes and insights with us. We rejoice that over the past century we have been able to have constructive dialogue with Mennonites (1989 – 1992, 2002), Lutherans (1986 – 1989), Reformed (1973 – 1977), Anglicans (2000 – 2004), Roman Catholics (1984 – 1988) and others. We look forward to additional opportunities for dialogue with other Christian communions in the future.

Forward to baptism

13. Believers' Baptism by immersion is the biblical way for those who have come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour to celebrate their life in Christ, and to commit themselves to the community of faith and to costly discipleship (Romans 6. 5-11).
14. We are baptized into Christ and incorporated by the power of the Holy Spirit into the greater family of Christians. In our local churches we form part of the company of those covenanted together in worship, discipleship and mission. We are also at one with those baptized in every nation, language, culture and race (Galatians 3.28, 29).
15. Within that baptized community, witness to the Gospel is evidenced by the shared meal, variously called amongst us the Lord's Supper, Communion or the Eucharist. This meal is a community meal with Christ at the heart and where the community of faith shares in the breaking and sharing of the bread and wine. We believe that the Holy Spirit takes such occasions to empower and strengthen the believers by sign and symbol for the missionary task entrusted to the church (1 Corinthians 11.23-32).
16. Daily we seek to manifest in every area of life that as baptized believers we are 'not conformed to this world', but are transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may discern what is the will of God – what is good, acceptable and perfect (Romans 12.2).

Forward in the gathering community of believers

17. Within the local gathering community of believers each disciple is given gifts and is called to live a life of worship, service, ministry and mission. Some are called out by these communities to exercise specific forms of servant leadership as pastors and deacons, superintendents and evangelists, teachers and administrators. Such callings are always by local communities of believers and within such communities. In our associating together in unions, conventions, federations and the BWA, some are called by commissioning, ordination or valediction to exercise certain forms of servant leadership. However, all are subject to Christ and to the discerning of his will by the community of believers (Ephesians 4.11-16).
18. As Baptists, we recognise no hierarchy among us. Rather, the community assigns certain tasks to called-out individuals and groups to function as leaders enabling the people of God in their mission. This is the model of Christ himself, as we understand it.
19. Many are called and set apart for a lifetime of service as pastors, missionaries, trans-local leaders, teachers and administrators. Others serve for short periods of time in specific offices.

Forward in the mission of the people of God

20. We believe in the Great Commission. Every believer is empowered by God and called to be a missionary. This is a life that includes learning as a disciple of Christ and sharing His witness. The need to share the Gospel is at the heart of our understanding of the church. The good news of Jesus Christ should be made known in word and deed to every person in every part of the world. Missions is an integral part of our history as Baptists. It must be a vital part of our future for the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth is unfinished. We believe that planting new local churches is fundamental to our missionary principle (Matthew 28.16-20).
21. Therefore, we encourage all Baptists everywhere to engage in local mission, in church planting and in prophetically relating God's grace to their particular situations. We join others through our unions, conventions, councils of churches, mission agencies and the BWA to work with each other in cross-cultural mission that the world might believe (John 3.17).

Forward to religious freedom and human rights

22. From our earliest beginnings we have understood that God desires every human being to come to Him freely and voluntarily. God desires

a response of faith and love, a response free of coercion or imposition of governments and rulers. We have been champions of the right of all people to enjoy religious liberty and other basic human rights because all people are created in God's image (Genesis 2.15 -20).

23. Our own Baptist story is full of persecution. We feel a deep empathy with those who today are persecuted by governments, by religious authorities and others. We affirm that in Jesus Christ, all peoples are equal and we oppose all forms of slavery, racism, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.
24. We mourn that many God-given human rights are still denied to the majority of the world's people by poverty and lack of access to medical, educational and life-enhancing spiritual resources. We celebrate the activities of countless Baptist individuals, churches, associations, unions and conventions, including the BWA, who try to minister to the most helpless and needy in humanity (Micah 6.8).
25. We humbly and passionately confess that Jesus calls us to be 'peace makers' and challenges us to find other ways to solve human differences apart from the conflict of war and violence. We pledge to join all people of good will to do our part in creating a culture of peace (Matthew 5.1-16).
26. So, on this centenary of the founding of our Baptist World Alliance, we once again proclaim religious freedom, peace and justice as inalienable rights given by God to all human beings. Wherever governments, religious organisations or other powers deny those rights we condemn it without reserve (Philippians 2. 1-5).

Forward as we care and pray for a world in need

27. God is the author of all creation. He created our world and called it good. He committed to human kind the care and stewardship of His created order. Stewardship of God's creation is a high calling. It calls believers to stand against those who seek to despoil, degrade or desecrate the beauty, variety and goodness of God's creation. We recognise a particular responsibility to care for our environment and to do all we can to preserve the richness and diversity which God ordained at creation (Genesis 1. 1- 2.3).
28. We believe the affairs of human beings should be ordered in ways which protect human dignity. We understand the calling upon us to do justice and walk humbly with our God. This is a call to work without ceasing for a more just, peaceful and human society. The Kingdom to which we are being drawn will be a place of peace and war will be no more. To this end we call upon all Baptists to support our involvement

in the work of those international bodies in the promotion of true human dignity and our basic rights and to do all in our power to support the needy and distressed. In this, we are mindful of the role played by our own agency, Baptist World Aid, and of kindred organisations supported by our member bodies. We renew our challenge to all within our churches to support these activities with prayer and practical action.

Forward as we equip the saints for the work of service

29. As women and men are brought to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, they embark on a life-long journey of Christian discipleship. Discipleship includes daily learning more about Christ and witnessing to His reality in our lives. At this centenary anniversary we affirm again the importance of community Bible study, evangelical and prophetic preaching and of on-going reflection on the Bible, God's Holy Word, within our churches and wider associations. We believe Christian faith is best understood and experienced within the community of faith. We commend all those who work in our Bible Schools, Colleges, Universities and Seminaries to understand more of the 'faith once delivered to the saints' and to impart their understandings and skills to others so that coming generations of believers might effectively engage the world in which they live with the good news of Jesus Christ (Jude 3).

Looking forward built on a firm foundation

30. We confess and declare the Lordship of Jesus Christ as we meet Him in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. These scriptures have supreme authority as the written Word of God and are fully trustworthy for faith and conduct. We also affirm the value of Christian history and of the abiding truths of the faith as proclaimed through the ages. We find value in the teachings of some of the ancient ecumenical creeds of the Church, such as those known as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD and the Apostles' Creed of c 400 AD (Philippians 2.5-11).
31. Baptists are not a creedal people. Yet most of our member bodies have ways of describing themselves as true disciples of Jesus Christ by means of statements of faith or declarations of principle. We recall the many confessions of faith produced by Baptist churches, unions and conventions throughout the world throughout our history.
32. Each Confession or Statement expresses something of the heart of who we are as authentic baptistic believers in Jesus Christ seeking to be faithful disciples and missionaries in our own time and place.

33. We understand ourselves to be part of an expression of the historic evangelical and ecumenical stream of Christian believing, arising out of the Reformation, and especially that understanding which is described as radical and evangelical. We understand this to describe the determination of Baptists to be true to the roots of Christianity as expressed in the New Testament and to proclaim that message and understanding to all people through word and deed.
34. During recent years we have sought to make clear some of our own deeply held convictions as an international community in the Seoul Covenant on Church Planting (1990), the Harare Declaration against Racism (1993), the Berlin Worship Declaration (1998), the Atlanta Statement against Racism (1999) and the Swanwick Covenant on Mission (2003).

In summary

35. On this centenary of the founding of the Baptist World Alliance we recommit ourselves to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the mission of the Triune God fully revealed in Him to share with all the life-giving news that through faith in Jesus Christ, God has forgiven our sin and liberated us from death. Central to this covenant is our call to take up the cross and follow Him. We, therefore, embrace the world through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in the ministry of reconciliation which has been entrusted to us.
36. As a worldwide fellowship of believers we experience daily the joys and agonies of sisters and brothers, 'If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together' (1 Corinthians 12.26).
37. Together with the people of God in every age and with the host of heaven we eagerly await the full and final fulfilment of God's redemptive purpose for all His creation 'when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2.10-11). AMEN.

Long Message for Discussion

Unanimously agreed for distribution by the BWA Congress Resolutions Committee, Birmingham, England, 26 July 2005.

Proselytism in a Central and Eastern European perspective

Introduction

I am a contextual missiologist, formerly employed by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) as a researcher in European Mission and Evangelism. The membership of CEC is both Protestant and Orthodox (Eastern and non-Chalcedonean). Given this constituency, CEC has been required to pay constant attention to issues of proselytism when discussing mission and evangelism.¹ These activities have often been characterised as obsessions of the western Protestant churches though in fact they are not absent from the Orthodox experience.² A further complicating factor in countries such as Russia is that the charge of proselytism is often levelled at the Roman Catholic Church, in membership of neither CEC nor the World Council of Churches (WCC). This perception is fuelled by the observation that many Roman Catholic priests in Russia today are of Polish nationality. In the Ukraine, proselytising activity is identified by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) with both the Greek Catholic Church (or 'Uniates') and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate). In every majority Orthodox or Roman Catholic context the minority charismatic and Pentecostal churches suffer the strongest opprobrium, whilst in at least one majority Lutheran context the term has been used to describe the activity of local Baptist congregations.³ It appears that the dynamic existing between majority and minority Christian traditions gains a dialectical, even conflictual, nature where the different religious traditions may at times seem little more than a veneer covering the more significant and underlying national realities and identities.

Proselytism: a brief history of a concept

The use of the term 'proselyte' became widespread during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods in Israel as a description of those who converted to Judaism. It is still used as such in contemporary Judaism.

¹ See *Charta Oecumenica*, a joint document of CEC and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of Europe (CCEE), signed by the Presidents of the two bodies on 22 April 2001 in Strasbourg. Text can be viewed at <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/charta.shtml>, accessed 20 November 2007.

² For example, see L. Veronis, *Missionaries, Monks and Martyrs: Making Disciples of all Nations* (Minneapolis, USA: Light and Life, 1994).

³ Reported to the author in conversation with one of my MTh. students from Norway.

The word 'proselyte' was originally used to designate in early Christian times, ...a person of another faith who converted to Christianity, ...proselytism in later centuries took on a negative connotation due to changes in the content, motivation, spirit and methods of 'evangelism'.⁴

The term came to have negative connotations with the Enlightenment, where it was identified with fanaticism and intolerance (though not necessarily limited to religious usage).

In current ecumenical usage, the term is used to refer to a certain kind of evangelistic mission that is coercive rather than persuasive; typified by deception, distortion, manipulation and exploitation. So, for example, the WCC document *Towards Common Witness* (1997) states,

'Proselytism' is now used to mean the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance, through ways and means that 'contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church'.⁵

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) felt the need to issue its own condemnation of proselytism in 2003. Attempting to distinguish between evangelism and proselytism, the text refers to the joint WCC and Roman Catholic text *Common witness and proselytism* (1970) and affirms that,

Proselytism takes place (1) whenever our motives are unworthy (when our concern is for our glory rather than God's), (2) whenever our methods are unworthy (when we resort to any kind of 'physical coercion, moral constraint, or psychological pressure'), and (3) whenever our message is unworthy (when we deliberately misrepresent other people's beliefs).⁶

Although the WEA statement condemns unworthy motives, methods, and message, it nevertheless reserves space for an individual freely to choose their own religious beliefs, indeed to change those beliefs. However, it carefully avoids any suggestion that changing one's religious beliefs necessarily implies a change of institutional religious affiliation. By way of contrast, attempts to define proselytism, drawing upon the ecumenical *Towards Common Witness*, have tended to decry activities that encourage others to join one's own church without addressing the extent or

⁴ J. Matthey, 'Towards Common Witness' in *You are the light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), p. 49.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Definition of Proselytism and Evangelism*, 2003, www.wea.org, accessed 20 November 2007.

nature of existing institutional religious affiliation. The range of censured activities has typically included the following:

- Criticising or caricaturing the beliefs and practices of another church without attempting to understand or enter into dialogue on those issues;
- Presenting one's own church as 'the true church' in unique possession of an elevated moral and spiritual status, simultaneously highlighting the alleged weaknesses and problems of another's church;
- Offering financial, educational or humanitarian inducements in the hope of recruiting others to one's own church;
- Using political, economic, moral, psychological, cultural or ethnic pressure with the goal of recruiting others to one's own church;
- Exploiting inadequate education, Christian instruction or an ignorance of history in order to persuade another to change their church allegiance.
- Threatening or deploying physical or emotional violence to induce people to change their church allegiance;
- Exploiting people's physical or mental illness, social isolation, emotional or psychological distress, offering 'conversion' as a panacea.

Allegations of proselytism, the inappropriate use of manipulation, spiritual or mental, or inducement, financial and material, to persuade a member of one Christian tradition to join another,⁷ bring to centre stage the discussion about the nature of proselytising Christian communities and those that resist their attempts at conversion and recruitment. At the heart of this discussion is a question of ethical behaviour. Put simply, the question may be formulated as, 'What is the appropriate ethical way of life for a Christian community engaging in mission and evangelism?'.

Ethics and mission

There is no mention of ethics as it relates to mission, evangelism, conversion or indeed proselytism in either *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*⁸ or *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*.⁹ If you were to search the internet and journal archives for the related terms, 'conversion

⁷ I resist the tendency to label *all* Christian witness directed towards the conversion of individuals, or communities, as 'proselytism'. See Andrew F. Walls for an important discussion of the difference between conversion and assimilation and their respective usage with regards the discourse of proselytism. A. Walls, 'Converts or Proselytes? The crisis over conversion in the early church' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 28 (1) January 2004, pp. 2-6.

⁸ J. McQuarrie, *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

⁹ R. Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

and ethics' or 'mission and ethics' you would struggle to find much that is meaningful. Within the missiological *corpus* it is not much better. The *Dictionary of Mission*¹⁰ contains a rather abstract article on ethics. The *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*¹¹ is only a little more useful, devoting two and a half pages to a discussion of mission, cross-cultural and contextual ethics. The failure of both dictionaries to address ethical questions raised by experiences and allegations of proselytism may seem an oversight, or it might suggest that both authors consider the proper place to discuss proselytism to fall within the theological domain, rather than that of ethics.

A notable exception is a chapter in Wilbert Shenk's *Anabaptism and Mission* which contains a useful discussion from the radical Reformation perspective.¹² Gallardo's chapter emphasises the need for integrity in communication, the avoidance of nationalism and cultural imperialism, and the necessity of obedient discipleship. It emphasises the nature of the missionary church, and highlights other theological and ethical requirements that bear upon authentic witness.

However, it seems generally true that proselytism has been overlooked as an appropriate subject within the discourse of ethics. As an undergraduate I gained the view that ethics was the preoccupation of Christians concerned to develop the 'right' understanding of a limited range of issues, including warfare, bioethics, family and sexual ethics. The way in which ethics was taught as an issue-based subject seemed to confirm this understanding. In contrast to this approach (which admittedly contains an element of caricature) I intend to adopt an understanding of ethics developed by Anabaptist systematic theologian, James McClendon.

Convictional communities in the dialogue of encounter

McClendon begins his study of systematic theology with a discussion of ethics. Starting with the question, 'What is theology?' he suggests that the answer, 'Just a "*logos* of *Theos*"', merely ideas and discourse about God' is inadequate and instead, he offers the following definition,

Theology [is] the discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the

¹⁰ K. Müller, ed., *Dictionary of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).

¹¹ S. Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

¹² W. Shenk, *Anabaptism and Mission* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1984).

discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and to whatever else there is.¹³

As to ethics, McClendon continues,

‘Christian ethics’ will refer to theories of the Christian way of life. These words can be used in other ways; this will be my way.¹⁴

I want to suggest that the ‘convictions’ described by McClendon, in the sense that he frames them with reference to a ‘way of life’, can only ever be embodied convictions, whether in community or individually. If, as a representative of such a convictional community, I am to maintain my integrity in order to convince others of the veracity of my convictions, McClendon’s insight becomes particularly crucial. In addition we may extend this definition of ethics as a ‘way of life’, being certain sets of actions appropriate to the Christian disciple and to the interior life of the disciple. We can then state that the attempt to embody a conviction is to self-reflexively address the question, ‘Who am I?’.¹⁵ Thereby Christian identity also falls within the domain of the ethical–theological life. When Jesus asks his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ (Matthew 13:13–16), we may understand him to be exploring with them the implication of the incarnation for his own sense of identity.

However, such a construction is problematised by the discourse of proselytism precisely when the transformation or critical revision of one’s existing convictions prompts the need for the self-reflexive individual to address a further question, ‘Who am I becoming?’. In the encounter of members or affiliates of two Christian traditions, the individual is likely to discover the extent to which he or she is embedded within the convictional communities of which they have hitherto been a part. The means by which such individuals are bound to those communities are likely to be a compelling amalgam, to a greater or lesser extent, of two clusters of theological–spiritual and historical–cultural factors. The manner in which these have been juxtaposed will be the test of either their resilience or their susceptibility. Understanding the juxtaposition is crucial to a proper appreciation of the issues that bear upon our discussion of mission and proselytism.

The classic dilemma for conversionist paradigms of mission is that they largely fail to adequately address the way in which cultural, ethnical

¹³ James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵ I have found British sociologist, Anthony Giddens, helpful in understanding the inter-relation of the individuals who identify with an institution, particularly as each bears upon the other. See, A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: outline of the theory of structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

and national identities bear upon questions of Christian identity; that is, upon the shared convictions of a convictional community. In the first volume of *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Manuel Castells¹⁶ places technological revolution and restructured world capitalism in a dialectical relationship with the search for identity. Whilst the former tend towards a dislocation of former social and economic certainties and locate notions of time and place in a virtual realm, the search for identity is located within very concrete forms of communal expression. With an encyclopaedic presentation Castells illustrates its location variously within religious fundamentalism, nationalism, ethnicity and territory; locations for which one reviewer chooses the descriptive term, 'treacherous slopes'.¹⁷

In the encounter of two or more Christian traditions, particularly majority Christian traditions with minority Christian traditions, a tendency emerges that echoes the dialectic suggested by Castells. In Central and Eastern Europe, the minority Christian traditions typically share a Western Christian heritage, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. More specifically, however, they are usually of the Reformation, whether Methodist, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran or charismatic. This tends to place them as the ready beneficiaries of technological revolution and renders them more amenable to restructured world capitalism.¹⁸ They may be less committed to ecclesiastical expressions constructed upon fixed notions of time and place. In some instances there may be little confessional commitment either.¹⁹ In contrast, the majority Orthodox traditions share a rather different historical and national experience. Time and place are essential components of Orthodox spirituality and self-understanding. The influence of national and territorial factors present within Orthodoxy remains ecclesiastically important, though becoming increasingly unfathomable to the other Christian traditions.²⁰

As a consequence, majority and minority Christian traditions have tended to assume alternative versions of the discourse of mission and

¹⁶ M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

¹⁷ M.J. Stern, 'Back to the Future? Manuel Castells' *The Information Age* and the Prospects for Social Welfare', in *Cultural Studies* (Routledge) 14(1) 2000, p. 99-116.

¹⁸ See for example, H. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: De Capo Press, 1996), for a discussion of Pentecostalism as the example *par excellence* of globalised Christianity.

¹⁹ Global and regional evangelical bodies, for instance, will command the loyalties of members drawn from the widest possible range of Christian traditions.

²⁰ These questions remain intractable beyond the traditional heartlands of the Orthodox Church. The claim of the Ecumenical Patriarch to jurisdictional authority over extra-territorial Orthodox communities is contested by some Orthodox. In practice, extra-territorial Orthodoxy has the appearance of being largely ethnically composed and in the USA, it may at first appear somewhat 'denominational'.

evangelism, each shaped by their respective historical and cultural experiences. The majority traditions, in the face of the perceived threat from more active minority traditions, adopt the discourse of proselytism as the preferred way of referring to mission and evangelism. Positively, this may be a valid attempt on the part of pastorally responsible church leaders to shore up the erosion of the religious and cultural identity of their church members when threatened by the mission activity of a minority church. It may, however, be used simply as a means of suppressing any mission activity by other historically present minority traditions. The minority traditions, in the face of perceived suppression and regulation, normally adopt the discourse of Human Rights as the preferred way of referring to mission and evangelism. Positively this may be a valid response to believing that basic human rights are being threatened. However, it may be little more than an attempt to justify aggressively expansionist plans in order to satisfy its existing members of spiritual vitality in the hope of their continued support and membership.

Consequently, rival forms of discourse for referring to mission and evangelism have made it very difficult for ecumenical discussion of mission and evangelism to proceed without allegations of deceptive expansionism by some and theological obscurantism by others. Even the task of finding and agreeing common language is a fraught exercise. Whilst 'mission' for some Orthodox might be nothing more than a Protestant obsession, for others it can be readily understood as the equivalent of the 'apostolic task' of the Church. Being of latin origin rather hinders its adoption as a commonly taken description for what the Church is called to do. Where the two dialogue partners have not agreed on a common discourse accessible equally to both, the potential for mutual understanding is diminished and mutual suspicion is simultaneously heightened. With the passing of time, each respective discourse has gained respectability and validity through theological formulations, pastoral experience, and the continued phenomena of church members who switch their allegiance from one tradition to another.

Thus, what is often observed between majority churches and minority churches is a conflict fuelled by underlying convictions relating to mission and proselytism within a particular territory, in particular the potential consequence, destructive and constructive, of these activities upon the collective and individual identities and affiliation of existing church members. It may be that by focussing upon identity in this way we are in danger of overlooking issues of how and why power and control are

wielded by Christian traditions. However, I would suggest that where identity is located primarily within one's understanding of nationality²¹ then to focus upon identity is by extension to raise the issue of the appropriate national role that ought to be played by identity-forming Christian communities. The extent to which Christian identity and national identity inform and shape the other is likely to be a powerful predictor of the influence and control of a national Church.

In what follows I want to tentatively suggest that it is only possible to critique adequately the discourse of proselytism with reference to a theologically ethical community. Allegations of proselytism are best addressed through a dialogue that acknowledges the functional role of history and culture, carefully scrutinises the phenomena being discussed, recognises the distinctions in the discourses, and refocuses the discussion upon how we are to nurture and witness to Christian identity from within our theologically formed ethical communities.

The discourse of proselytism and the example of the Russian Orthodox Church

The theological vision of the Eastern Orthodox Churches emphasises the visible unity of the Church.²² One specific development of this theological vision is the concept of 'canonical territory',²³

The concept of canonical territory denotes the inseparable identity of people, culture, land, and church.²⁴

Pre-empting the discussion of human rights below, we may say that this vision is collectivist and heteronomous (in contrast to autonomous). It is holistic, mystical, and arises from a profound reflection on incarnation and the indivisibility of the body of Christ. It privileges place and history as the appropriate locale within which the one Body of Christ can take shape. 'People' and 'nation' are thus to be understood as particular expressions of place and history, and therefore a theologically justified arena for the redemptive purposes of God. It is this vision that gives rise to the

²¹ To be differentiated from identification with the Nation State which, as Castells points out, is increasingly less likely to command our loyalty and provide the primary locale for our identity formation.

²² Sometimes emphasised in contrast to the Protestant notion of the 'invisible' unity of the church.

²³ See Section 6, 'Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the non-Orthodox on her canonical territory' in *Basic Principles of the Russian Orthodox Church's Attitude to the Non-Orthodox* (2004), available at <http://www.mospat.ru>.

²⁴ D.A. Kerr, 'Christian Understandings of Proselytism', in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 23 (1) January 1999, p. 9.

theological rationale for challenging the proselytising of various missionary groups (usually though not exclusively from the West).

The Russian Orthodox Church defines proselytism as the active or passive encouraging of members of a given ethnic or national group to join a religion, denomination, or sect that is not historically rooted in that ethnic group or nationality.²⁵

We may, of course, note the difficulty of determining what is meant by 'historically rooted'. How historic is 'historical'; fifteen years or fifty? Knowledge of certain groups that have been active and present can be forgotten, suppressed or ignored. History has proven highly vulnerable to officially sanctioned versions of it.²⁶ Properly approaching history and its interpretation requires an appropriate sensitivity to any interests that the history writer represents. It is hard to imagine the level of skill, patience and commitment to historical integrity that is required to sift through archival material drafted according to the canons of Soviet propaganda in order to discover fragments of truth regarding the history of the Christian traditions in the Former Soviet Union (or indeed in the Russian Empire of the Tsars).

However, the *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*²⁷ document illustrates well the position advanced by Castells. Ethnicity and nationality are given a functional value determinative of what may be considered proselytism. The definition allows for Christian mission activity to be considered appropriate in one particular ethnic and national context, whilst in another the same mission activity is inappropriate. With the demise in influence and function of the Nation State, according to Castells, the functional value of ethnicity and nationality will prove to be as contestable (and controversial) as claims to historicity. This is largely because these identifiers have become notoriously difficult terms to define with precision, a point underlined by Vera Tolz with her discussion of the (re)building of national identity in Russia and the five competing visions of the Russian nation available to those constructing the new nationalist discourse.²⁸

In 1996 the Chairman of the External Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Kirill, addressed the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. In his speech he drew attention to a crisis of human civilisation caused by the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See for example J. Byford, 'Distinguishing Anti-Judaism from Antisemitism: recent Championing of Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović', in *Religion, State & Society*, 34(1), March 2006, pp. 7-31.

²⁷ *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* (Geneva: WCC, 2000).

²⁸ V. Tolz, 'Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia' in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50 (6) (Taylor & Francis) 1998, pp. 993-1022.

global crisis of human personality. He called for the privileging of Christian identity (through attention to spiritual renewal) over Christian activism (particularly of a socio-political type), implying that the ecumenical programmes of the WCC began in the wrong place. In the same speech, a full third of his text addressed issues of mission and proselytism. He began this section in the following way,

Proselytism... is more than a purely theological issue... It is primarily an expression of cultural and ideological clashes, as newcomers try to impose their own culturally conditioned form of Christianity on other Christians.²⁹

In 2001, Patriarch Aleksii, addressed, by letter, a mission consultation organised jointly in Moscow by the Anglican Church Mission Society and Orthodox Missiologists. He underlined the themes raised by Metropolitan Kirill,

Missionaries, not concious (*sic*) of the values of the local culture, harm the spiritual wellbeing of society...³⁰

However, non-Orthodox writers are also amongst those who are critical of the insensitive and aggressive efforts of some western missionaries, ‘Most of the time they were seen as ambassadors of their country’s culture and ideology, and not of Jesus’.³¹ Such criticisms may be readily elicited from Baptists and other evangelical Christians in many parts of the former Soviet Union. Such judgements are reflected in the more sober response of senior theological educators in Russia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Georgia who, reporting on the current challenges to theological education in their regions, point to the need to move away from the ‘off-the-shelf’ theological programmes they were offered during the early 1990s and to adopt more contextually appropriate curricula.³²

However, the discourse deployed above construes proselytism as principally a cross-cultural encounter in which existing ethnic and national identities are ignored and alternative forms of cultural Christianity are offered or imposed. In practice it has proven difficult for many Western newcomers and missionaries to understand, even imagine, how religiously and culturally homogenous cultures continue to survive, even flourish, in the globalising world with which they are personally very familiar (and with which they may often be all too comfortable). Equally it has

²⁹ Metropolitan Kirill, ‘Gospel and Culture’ in C. Durasingh, ed., *Called to one Hope* (Geneva: WCC, 1998), p. 89.

³⁰ Patriarch Aleksii, ‘Greeting’ in M. Oxbrow, ed., *Together in Mission* (London: CMS, 2001), p. 5.

³¹ J. Gallardo, ‘Ethics and Mission’ in Shenk, *Anabaptism and Mission*, p. 138.

³² Reported to me on a number of occasions through personal conversations.

sometimes proven difficult for representatives of the indigenous churches in Central and Eastern Europe to imagine ways in which the impact of globalisation upon local cultures can be evaluated beneficially. A typical response has been to simply dismiss it by characterising globalisation as little more than ‘secularisation’, ‘westernisation’, ‘democratisation’ or ‘late-capitalism’. Individuals sensitive to the history of cultural exchange and interchange might suggest that the only cultures that have been resistant to change were either ossified or dead.

In the statements of Kirill and Aleksii, the agents of differently composed forms of cultural and ideological Christianity are construed as ‘the other’. Romanian theologian Silvana Bunea has described how an encounter with the ‘other’ by the Orthodox is frequently perceived as a threat to one’s identity, typically resulting in the adoption of a defensive posture.³³ The demands placed upon attempts at authentic dialogue must therefore take seriously the reasons for this posture being so frequently adopted and seek to address the often genuine concerns that underlie it. The discourse deployed by the representatives of the Orthodox Church may be uncomfortable for Western Christians to read but it points to the instinctive assumptions and attitudes that many western missionaries share and which inform their ecclesiology and theology more than they might care to admit. This can often appear to non-Westerners as little more than applying the techniques of the market-place to the religious domain. It is worth citing *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today* in full on this point,

Indeed, the highly competitive environment of the free market is reinforcing many churches and para-church movements in their perception of mission as the effort to attract and recruit new ‘customers’, while retaining the old ones. Their programmes and doctrines are presented as ‘religious products’, which must be appealing and attractive to potential new members. They evaluate the success of their mission in terms of growth, of numbers of converts or of newly planted churches. Unfortunately, very often their ‘new members’ already belonged to other churches. Thus proselytism (as competition and ‘sheep-stealing’) is one of the sharp contemporary issues facing the churches.³⁴

The Orthodox Church in post-Soviet Russia understands herself to be threatened by active Protestant missionary groups offering an alternative identity-constituting discourse that is not always constructed with reference to ethnicity or nationality. Indeed in certain cases a universalising form of

³³ S. Bunea, ‘Reflections on the encounter of Orthodoxy with cultural differences’ in *Connections*, 7 (1), 2003.

³⁴ See, *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*, paragraph 27.

evangelicalism is offered that in reality *does* reflect the cultural assumptions of the missionary. When one discusses the newer churches in Budapest, for example, a younger generation will readily talk excitedly about ‘Calvary Chapel’, one of many similar congregations currently being ‘planted’ in Central and Eastern Europe that has imported US-derived ecclesiastical values and guarantees these by conferring the quality assurance of its name as a ‘religious brand’, wherever it plants congregations.

The response of the Russian Government to the rapid and widespread multiplication of this type of Christian group has been the September 1997 law ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations’, overturning many of the reformist principles of the 1990 ‘Law on Freedom of Worship’ which guaranteed religious freedoms familiar to many in the western world. The attitude of the Christian community to this legislation is varied. Some express enthusiastic endorsement for the privileged status it confers upon the Orthodox Church as the historic Russian Church. Some find its restrictions objectionable and label it a return to Soviet-style legislation. Others express regret that such a measure should have been necessary yet hope that it will afford a measure of protection against the excesses of aggressive western missionary movements.

In contemporary Russia, culture, ethnicity and nationality remain disputed notions and the controversy generated over discussions of the alternatives is likely to have its counterpart in Christian dialogue and ecumenical discussion of mission and evangelism for some time to come.

Ecumenical and evangelical responses to mission and proselytism

It has been entirely appropriate that those Churches that have submitted themselves to an ecumenical discipline should make every effort to condemn what they sincerely and genuinely believe to be proselytism. Indeed, a number of these will themselves have suffered the loss of their own members to a variety of unaffiliated and vigorously active protestant churches and groups. However, their response has perhaps not always been as forthcoming as it might because of a deep commitment to notions of inalienable human rights, usually enshrined in various charters and declarations.³⁵

³⁵ For example, one may consider *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), *The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (1950), *The International*

As an example, the Conference of European Churches issued the widely adopted and consulted *Charta Oecumenica: a text, a process, and a dream of the Churches in Europe*³⁶ in which the following statements with regards to mission and evangelism are included:

We commit ourselves

- to discuss our plans for evangelisation with other churches, entering into agreements with them and thus avoiding harmful competition and the risk of fresh divisions.
- to recognise that every person can freely choose his or her religious and church affiliation as a matter of conscience, which means not inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive, but also not hindering anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will.

In 1997 the World Council of Churches issued an extensive treatment of these and related themes entitled *Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism*.³⁷ In this document the WCC underlined, in very clear terms, its own commitment to the concept of Human Rights and Religious Liberty. The pertinent section is quoted here in full:

3. Mission in the context of religious freedom

God's truth and love are given freely and call for a free response. Free will is one of the major gifts with which God has entrusted humans. God does not force anyone to accept God's revelation and does not save anyone by force. On the basis of this notion, the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches (in process of formation) developed a definition of religious freedom as a fundamental human right. This definition was adopted by the WCC First Assembly in Amsterdam (1948), and at the suggestion of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs it was subsequently incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes the freedom to change his/her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, to manifest his/her religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and *The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981).

³⁶ V. Ionita (ed.), 'Charta Oecumenica: a text, a process, and a dream of the Churches in Europe' (Geneva: Conference of European Churches, 2003).

³⁷ Anon., 'Towards Common Witness: A call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism' (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997).

and observance.’ The same principle is to be applied in mission work.

The WCC Fifth Assembly (1975) reaffirmed the centrality of religious liberty, stating that ‘the right to religious freedom has been and continues to be a major concern of member churches and the WCC. However this right should never be seen as belonging exclusively to the church... This right is inseparable from other fundamental human rights. No religious community should plead for its own religious liberty without active respect and reverence for the faith and basic rights of others. Religious liberty should never be used to claim privileges. For the church this right is essential so that it can fulfill its responsibilities which arise out of the Christian faith. Central to these responsibilities is the obligation to serve the whole community.’ One’s own freedom must always respect, affirm and promote the freedom of others; it must not contravene the golden rule: ‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Matt. 7:12).

Citing ecumenical and Roman Catholic texts, the WEA issued its own definition of proselytism and then condemned it in the following terms, in its document *Proselytism vs. evangelism* (2003):

The World Evangelical Alliance strongly rejects proselytism but supports full religious freedom according to the United Nations declaration of Human Rights (Articles 18 and 19). That freedom will give people of every religion the right to share their beliefs and allow everyone the freedom of conscience to believe as they choose.³⁸

The WEA statement does not command equal respect amongst all evangelicals. ‘Some evangelicals have manifested a reluctance to entertain issues of... human rights for fear of diverting attention away from evangelism and church planting’.³⁹

Equally reluctantly, some Orthodox are cautious of the discourse of Universal Human Rights. Many of them might find themselves in the, perhaps surprising, company of one evangelical commentator on Human Rights legislation, that

Much modern rights-talk has connotations that are egoistic, licentious and antagonistic: in short, that are profoundly anti-Christian. For rights carry an inherent bias favouring individualism

³⁸ G. Edmonds, ‘Proselytism vs. Evangelism’ (Edmonds:World Evangelical Alliance, 2003).

³⁹ M.D. Carroll, ‘Ethics’, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), pp. 319-322.

over collectivism, autonomy over heteronomy, and conflict over consensus.⁴⁰

In each of the ecumenical and evangelical texts, appeal is made to the discourse of Human Rights. Significantly, the WCC statement draws attention to the inclusion of religious freedom clauses within the UN's Declaration at the suggestion of the WCC's own staff following the 1948 WCC Assembly. Minority Churches have been continuously represented within each of the constituencies responsible for these three documents. In many instances, membership of various regional and worldwide confessional or ecumenical bodies has been a means of ameliorating the perceived threat of the majority Churches to their minority counterparts, a means of seeking and securing some guarantee of basic freedoms of religious belief and practice in a majority context.

However, in addition to the evangelical cautions noted above, we may also note that the universal intention of the United Nations' Declaration is viewed with deep suspicion by some Orthodox who relativise its claims by arguing that it is an expression of western cultural aspirations and suggest alternative visions of freedom (from the Bible) might be prior to this.

The canons of the Orthodox Church help one understand the essence of Christian freedom as knowledge of the Truth (John 8:32). They protect the Christian from the secular understanding of freedom, based on the legal principle of the equality of all religions.⁴¹

Some highlight the abuses of freedoms implicit in the Universal Declaration, suggesting the triumph of license over liberty. The discourse of human rights has, in some instances, become little more than a means whereby, 'fundamental interests', or, 'forms of legitimate control over another – implying their duty to me' have been used viciously or virtuously. In some instances they have been extended to the point where they appear bizarre. Consequently their social utility has been brought into question. It might be worth noting at this point that the Islamic world has always been extremely cautious about using human rights discourse (obedience to the divine will of Allah is stressed over and against any notion of human autonomy).

⁴⁰ J. Rivers, *Beyond rights: the morality of rights-language*, Cambridge Papers (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre), (6) 3, September 1997, see http://www.jubilee-centre.org/cambridge_papers/?page=3.

⁴¹ Archbishop Ioann, 'Ecclesiological and canonical foundations of Orthodox mission' in *Together in Mission*, p. 59.

Ethics, theology and identity in the light of Christian mission

In 1996, Metropolitan Kirill made his position very clear: mission, more accurately described as proselytism, was primarily an expression of cultural and ideological conflict in which the victims were Orthodox Christians.⁴² By 2001, as seen in Patriarch Aleksii's letter, the deleterious effects of proselytism were considered to extend to the spiritual wellbeing of society as a whole.⁴³ At the 2002 consecration of an Orthodox Church at the Lubyanka headquarters of the FSB (successor to the KGB), Patriarch Aleksii stressed the, 'need for concerted actions aimed at combating the current threats posed to Russia's 'spiritual security'... a concept that is very much on the public agenda in contemporary Russia'.⁴⁴

Removing the discourse of proselytism from the theological domain of mission and evangelism and re-locating it in the conceptual domain of culture, ethnicity and nationality has several implications. Firstly, this is conceptually slippery territory and therefore all the more difficult to navigate for ecumenical dialogue partners who do not understand contemporary Russia and its nation-building programmes (within which alternative notions of ethnicity and nationality compete). Secondly, the discovery of a common language to discuss the issues of mission and proselytism becomes increasingly unlikely. Thirdly, it tends to overlook the legitimacy of indigenous Russian and Slavic forms of non-Orthodox Christianity that have existed on Russian territory for several centuries or more, in some cases.

However, a more adequate response to this conceptual shift is demanded of the non-Orthodox Churches than simply to adopt the discourse of Human Rights. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts fundamental rights (including religious freedoms), 'without distinction of ...race, ...national or social origin'.⁴⁵ It is self-evident that the adoption of universalised rights provides an alternative domain (particularly Article 18) in which to develop a discourse of mission and proselytism. However, the discourse of human rights appears to lack a fully adequate vocabulary to respond to questions of identity and culture, other than to reiterate that these cannot be used to justify discriminatory

⁴² Kirill, 'Gospel and Culture', p. 89.

⁴³ Aleksii, 'Greeting' in *Together in Mission*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ J. Elkner, 'Spiritual Security in Putin's Russia', in *History & Policy*, January 2005, at <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/archive/pol-paper-print26.html>.

⁴⁵ Anon., *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: United Nations, 1948), at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

behaviour. Secondly, as we have seen above, the universality of human rights is not as widely accepted as might be assumed and has, in fact, been understood by some parts of the Christian Church (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox) as an alternative liberal and secular version of the Kingdom of God: and consequently the weaker for it.

What can be observed in the dialogue of minority and majority churches is a reliance on alternative discourses of mission and proselytism. One is located in the domain of 'local' ethnic and nationality identity, the other in the domain of 'universal' Human Rights. Both dialogue partners have abandoned the theological–ethical domain as the most appropriate for supplying a common language to discuss deeply divisive issues. The recovery of a common language, theological and ethical, is paramount if mutual understanding is genuinely to be sought. Petros Vassiliadis, a Greek Orthodox theologian, understands this point well as a consequence of his long experience as a dialogue partner within WCC ecumenical processes.⁴⁶

A second reason for the failure to arrive at consensus about proselytising activity is due in large part to the lack of a commonly understood theological vision and of the way of life that this implies. The failure is primarily a theological failure, it is not a failure of human rights. Theological vision is the central issue for our discussion as it relates to how particular theologically-formed communities understand themselves and establish their self-identity. This is of particular concern for Churches caught in the dialectic of minority Church – majority Church. If we can assume that Christian identity is constructed in community, then identity construction is a corporate undertaking shaped not only by perceptions of, and relationships to, the communal insider but also by perceptions of and relationships to the communal outsider. If the outsider is perceived as threatening then I am unlikely to leave little space in my theological self-identity for 'the other'. In fact I am likely to erect distinct theological and communal fences that enable me to minimise all encounter with the other.

In January 2004 I was introduced as an ecumenical guest from the Baptist Church to a class of Orthodox catechists in St. Petersburg. Of the thirty adults present, only two had ever met a Baptist before. I suspect that the same lack of encounter with the religious other might equally have been true if I were to have asked a similar-sized group of Baptist candidates for church membership about their close friendships with Orthodox Christians.

⁴⁶ P. Vassiliadis, *Eucharist and Witness: Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church* (New York: Holy Cross Seminary, 2002).

The lack of encounter with the other is at the heart of the current challenge facing the WCC as it struggles to create space for the vital and growing evangelical and pentecostal churches of the global South. Vassiliadis has been critical of the WCC in the past for its failure in bringing such dialogue partners to the ecumenical discussions of mission and proselytism.⁴⁷ The energy and mutual respect demonstrated by participants during their presentation of the Pentecostal-Orthodox dialogue to the WCC's World Mission Conference in Athens, May 2005, is an excellent example of what is possible when a new openness to the 'other' is demonstrated; even where the missionary or regulatory activity of the 'other' has traditionally been seen as mutually injurious.

The Pentecostal-Orthodox dialogue demonstrates that inter-confessional conflict, whether cultural, ideological or ethical, can only ever find its proper theological-ethical resolution through theological openness to the other. Only where one is able to locate the other in inter-relationship to one's own confessional community is it possible to begin to address the questions of ethnicity, nationality and identity together.

Rowan Williams, then Bishop of Monmouth, eloquently articulated the significance that the wellbeing of the Christian community has for the reduction and resolution of ethical conflict, in a series of questions he posed to the Lambeth Conference in 1998,

Can we then begin thinking about our ethical conflicts in terms of our understanding of the Body of Christ? The first implication, as I have suggested, is to do with how we actually decide what we are to do, what standard we appeal to. An ethic of the Body of Christ asks that we first examine how any proposed action or any proposed style or policy of action measures up to two concerns: how does it manifest the selfless holiness of God in Christ? And how can it serve as a gift that builds up the community called to show that holiness in its corporate life?⁴⁸

The theological vision of McClendon, mentioned at the outset of this paper, suggests the need for an appropriate spirituality of suffering in the face of (real or perceived) injustices. Simultaneously it would also point to the temptation for particular Christendom forms of the Church to disavow its role as servant in taking to itself the trappings of State privilege and power.

⁴⁷ Personal conversation. 13th May 2005, Athens.

⁴⁸ R. Williams, 'On Making Moral Decisions', in *Anglican Theological Review*, (81) 2, Spring 1999, p. 12.

Mission (or evangelism), *[is to be]* understood not as an attempt to control history for the ends we believe to be good, but as the responsibility to witness to Christ – and accept the suffering that witness entails.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 28.

Family Virtues and Human Dignity

Introduction

According to recent researches for the Americans¹ the most typical representation of a family involves three criteria: first, heterosexuality, second, the presence of marriage, and third, the presence of children.² However, this understanding of family, often called a 'traditional' or 'nuclear' family, is no longer the only one or the predominant model. Societies across the world³ are populated by families comprising of single parents (usually mothers) with children, parents without children, two cohabiting partners, partners with adopted children... There are of course gay and lesbian families, too. Could any or all of these models be called families, after all?

More than that, the world is undergoing huge changes: the globe we live on is shrinking due to the high mobility of people and goods and the increasing availability of information; new markets are opening up; various cultures encounter each other and their values and traditions get mingled in unprecedented ways... It is no wonder then that some are desperate to take hold of some reference point, to cling to some element of the 'old' which would provide stability and lend support in the face of the 'new' that can be so merciless in its questioning of the 'traditional' ways.

1. Statement of the problem: 'Traditional family values' in danger

We should not be surprised, therefore, by the fact that in different parts of the world a call for a recovery of 'traditional family values' can be heard. Consider an example from my own country, Croatia.

1.1 Holidays as occasions to keep traditional family values

During a process involving bloodshed, ethnic enmity and serious calamities, Croatia regained its independence at the beginning of the 1990s. The overthrowing of communism and the opportunity to rediscover national identity for most Croatians carried the meaning of freedom to

¹ A high proportion of resources used in this paper come from a Northern American context, but I believe a striking resemblance can be noticed throughout the Western world, including my country of Croatia.

² Cameron Lee, *Beyond Family Values: A Call to Christian Virtue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 26-43.

³ Not to the same extent, however. The Western world has been much more influenced by changes in the experience and understanding of family. However, with the advancement of globalisation, things are more likely to change in even the most remote parts of the world.

openly fashion their private and public lives according to patterns that have been suppressed for a long time. These patterns, reflected in tradition and culture, are intimately related to the Catholic Church to which a great majority of Croatians belong. As a result of the war, this connection grew even stronger as the enemies—the Serbs—were Orthodox. Religious affiliation was used, on both sides, as a vehicle of differentiating from the enemy and a fuel for nourishing nationalism.

Even before the war was over, Croatian society began its transformation into a capitalist society with a market economy. The new and the old came together in a peculiar way. But very soon the first objections were formulated against the overriding of ‘traditional values’. As it turned out, the family was considered to be especially endangered, with individualism and other features ‘imported’ from the West enabling younger generations to search for the meaning of life in other quarters.

To recover these ‘family values’, some voices within the Catholic Church began to associate the terminology of family values with the celebrations of Easter and Christmas.⁴ Year after year, an invitation is repeated to spend these holidays within ‘the family circle’, to cherish ‘real family values’.⁵ In recent years, a significant segment of secular society began to echo this chorus. Thus, at these two points during a year, there is a general consensus on the ultimate importance of the family.

Although I am a Christian, a family member, a father of two children, and a husband, this does not seem right to me! Let me explain my doubts regarding the legitimacy of this approach. If Christmas is supposed to remind me of the value that the family is supposed to be for me, and if I am to spend it strictly within my family, what is the good news of Christmas for those without a family – orphans, strangers, members of dysfunctional families? Are they second-rate citizens, or, even worse, second-rate believers? Are family values something to be preserved and cherished only within the secure boundaries of our families? What do I, in this way, communicate to my children about the relationship of family and outer reality?

This piece of personal experience underlines a more general trend, but in order to acquire a better understanding of the battle that is going on over family values, we need to turn our attention to shifts in contemporary culture.

⁴ These religious holidays are especially convenient as Croatians have always celebrated them, even during the Communist time.

⁵ One would not hear this so often within non-Catholic Christian churches, but the practices within their families during holidays resemble the prevailing cultural trend.

1.2 Influence of shifts in contemporary culture

The very fact that there is so much discussion on family values reveals that they ‘... are like the air we breathe: we depend on them, but they go unnoticed until disturbed’.⁶ Yet what has disturbed them?

One of the factors could be identified as ‘social saturation’, to use the term coined by Kenneth Gergen, which takes place when a multitude of images and values by means of advanced technologies bombards the family (or individual).⁷ Faced with such a manifold offer of values, people tend to develop various interests. However, they usually change them frequently, simply because ‘saturation’ is an ongoing and irresistible process. Consequently, relationships are based on a shallow, ever-shifting ground of common interest. Within this kind of setting, family members are very rarely able to relate on the basis of shared values.

In addition, the understanding of the family role tends to be influenced by security issues. To put it simply, the world is becoming a more and more dangerous place. Even before the recent wake of international terrorism, there was a growing feeling of insecurity caused by the increase of violence, drug abuse, financial instability, unemployment, etc. Within such setting, there is a higher probability of conceiving the family as something that must be protected and something that protects its members from the evil coming from the outside.⁸

Furthermore, although the consumerist mentality is not a novelty in the Western world, it has nevertheless gained a more prominent role than ever. Proof of this is the level of manipulation by which the market governs our desires. David Matzko McCarthy spells it out: ‘The market requires that our desires be nomadic, that our longings never find a resting place. In the market, our experiences of things and people are considered ideal when they conjure up more desire, and drive us incessantly onward to new things.’⁹

Certainly not the last shift, but among the most notable ones, is the result of the separation of church and state. Earlier, the ‘interests’ of these two within Christendom very often overlapped significantly, if not completely. It is not so anymore; nowadays serious differences in opinion

⁶ Lee, *Beyond Family Values*, p. 69.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 80-85.

⁸ For example, in his analysis of depictions of family in three films (Dick Tracy, Terminator 2 and Interview with the Vampire), Gerard Loughlin concludes that in today’s world, the family is not anymore perceived as a valid alternative to the society overwhelmed by fear – all it can be is ‘a barricade against the wider terror’, Gerard Loughlin, ‘The Want of Family in Postmodernity’, in Stephen C. Barton, ed., *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 313.

⁹ D.M. McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p. 243.

between the church and the state arise concerning the function and the nature of certain social realities. Rodney Clapp suggests that the family's shape and destiny could well be one of those points of disagreement.¹⁰

There is no doubt that these shifts can disturb practically any traditional notion, but before we turn to further exploration of what really is at stake here and what constitutes a problem for the Christian vision of family, let me comment briefly on the issue of human dignity.

1.3 Human dignity under pressure

The aforementioned influences, among other factors, pose a threat to human dignity. Capitalism as an economic system is founded on the dissatisfaction of people because it drives people to feel incomplete with the things they already possess, and nudges them to search for fulfilment in new purchases.¹¹ This generation of the feeling that final happiness is just 'one-more-thing-to-be-bought' away makes people prone to making comparisons with others (neighbours, relatives, colleagues...). The struggle is condemned to failure since we always compare ourselves to those who apparently have more.

Being reduced to a small part of the great machine of consumerism, the overwhelming impression that the family has to be defended at all cost, and the reality of weak relationships within the very family one is to protect, diminishes the dignity of the individual and the family because it simply undercuts the potential of each human being to develop and discover all of his/her gifts within the family setting. The core of this paper's thesis is this: Christian family virtues have a potential to restore and enhance human dignity. That proposal will receive a more detailed treatment under Section 3.

2. Re-statement of the problem: Misunderstanding of the role of the family

The next step is to determine the Christian understanding of family. However, this investigation will prove authentic only if its evidence can help us to decide whether surrounding culture exercises its formative influence on Christian values.¹² This will help to give us a clearer perception of today and the reason for hope for a better tomorrow.

¹⁰ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional Roles and Modern Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 44.

¹¹ Julie Hanlon Rubio, 'Does family conflict with community?' in *Theological Studies* 58 no. 4 (December 1997), p. 613.

¹² Lee, *Beyond Family Values*, p. 43. Correlative to this would be 'the recovery of habits of the mind that give us skills to understand the world in which we live on our own terms and not on the world's terms'.

2.1 Origin and nature of the public-private dichotomy

In the ‘traditional family’, the roles are neatly differentiated. The husband is in charge of financially providing for the family; the wife is to take care of the children and household. The husband is to face the cruel and corrupted world outside, while the primary task of the wife is to nurture the family in order to create a safe emotional and spiritual ‘haven’ from the outside world. Clapp has done an excellent analysis of ‘traditional family’ in American history and here are some of his findings. First of all, there are striking similarities between the bourgeois family of the nineteenth century and the ‘traditional family’.¹³ Second, the Industrial Revolution proved to be a turning point in the role of the family. It ceased to be a wider, production-oriented household and turned into a much smaller unit which rendered most of its previous responsibilities to the state or society.¹⁴ Thus the public-private division was introduced and began to be used as a means of further specialisation of roles. As a contrast, Lee presents a picture of the Puritan notion of family which functioned as a household with a highly social character based on a wider network of kin relationships and economic considerations.¹⁵

Janet Fishburn points to the foundational importance of the family during the Victorian era (1830-1913) for the existence and stability of entire civilisation.¹⁶ During that period, she argues, American Protestants made the mistake of confusing the hope of christianising America with the Christian faith itself. The result was not a civilisation becoming Christian, but a domestication of Protestant churches.¹⁷ Consequently, supposedly Christian family values actually first and foremost served as a guarantee of social unity and progress.

However, more recently the withdrawal into the safety of the home and the desire to preserve Christian ethical values came as a result of a wider dichotomy between personal and social spheres. In its turn, it also helped to reinforce and reaffirm this very dichotomy. As a result, the family began to occupy only the realm of privacy and lost most of its social dimension and impact.

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 48, quoted in Lee, p. 47.

¹³ See Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, pp. 30-34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-57.

¹⁵ Lee, *Beyond Family Values*, pp. 50-55.

¹⁶ Janet Fishburn, *Confronting the Idolatry of Family: A New Vision for the Household of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 12.

¹⁷ Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) quoted in Fishburn, *Confronting the Idolatry of Family*, p. 12.

All of this provides a good argument for claiming that the ‘traditional family’ is not a ‘biblical’ model of family – a model that could be directly transferred from any period of Israel’s or church history. Rather, it has its roots in a much more recent history. Family values advocated by supporters of the ‘traditional family’ are much more historically and socially conditioned than they are usually ready to admit. This fact may also serve to turn our attention to what may be the *real* problem in the contemporary discussion of the role of the family. Cameron Lee puts it this way: ‘... the crisis of the family is less about the trials and tribulation of individual families, or even the form the family takes, than about the steadily shrinking range of social contexts that call forth our capacities to cooperate, love and make sacrifices for one another’.¹⁸

2.2 The consumerist mentality

The change brought about by the Industrial Revolution not only narrowed down the scope of the family but also planted a seed of profound change in relationships within the family. Abandonment of its productive activities led the family to accept the task of the consumption of goods produced by the wider society. Gradually this turned all family relationships into product-oriented relationships.¹⁹ Since today every individual is considered to be a consumer, the market is doing its best to manipulate the individual with every imaginable value, including those related to the family!

McCarthy illustrates this with the idea of securing adequate parental care, love and atmosphere in the home: ‘Growth capitalism provides ever-increasing standards for good parents ... Affection, for all classes, carries a financial burden; monetary resources are the making of harmony at home.’²⁰ To follow McCarthy further, we would need to concede that in families reinforced by the consumerist mentality, the children are more often than not reduced to being *objects of investment* (be it financial resources, energy, time, feelings).²¹ Being a parent myself, I reluctantly must admit that there is a strong ring of truth in this statement.

Consumer mentality pushes society towards selfishness and egocentricity, and its impact is often too strong for the family to resist. Moreover, in terms of relating to the social sphere, consumerism manages to establish the consumption of goods as family’s *crucial* contribution to public life.²² Since supporters of ‘traditional family values’ would not agree

¹⁸ Lee, *Beyond Family Values*, p. 56.

¹⁹ McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, p. 89.

²⁰ Ibid..

²¹ Ibid., p. 93.

²² Ibid., p. 3.

that their family ideal is based on its function of consumption, it is worthwhile to explore this public-private relation a little further.

2.3 The family and its social role

Of course, the picture of the family portrayed so far is not meant to depict an entirely self-sufficient, independent unit. However, what this description does suggest is that communication with the world outside is rather practical in its nature and tends to happen through paying for professional services, earning wages and consuming goods. John Kavanaugh believes that it is the last of these three that isolates people from their neighbours and family and makes it possible for them not to hear the cries of the poor.²³ McCarthy is on the same track when taking note that in terms of social economy, 'the closed home is inclined to limit gift-giving not because giving is a burden, but because *receiving is*' (italics mine).²⁴ The inner logic is clear: receiving is dangerous as it entails a sort of social exchange not based on financial terms and therefore may pose a threat to firmly defined boundaries of the family nucleus. Thus it is safer not to perceive the needs of others, because then giving is unnecessary and receiving is not likely to occur.

In his analysis of the historical detachment of family from the public arena, Clapp first concludes that the only purpose left was the intimacy and nurture of 'private' relationships which led to trivialisation of the private, and then goes on to suggest that '...perhaps not so coincidentally, Christian faith was also removed from the public realm and trivialized'.²⁵ The correctness of this last point may be more or less visible depending on the context of a particular society and culture. What remains beyond doubt, however, is this: if the struggle over traditional family values is inspired by the hopes that the institution of the family is the last (or one of the last) resorts the church has for restoring basic structures of society, then the family's mission is doomed to a disastrous failure. The reason is tangible: at present the state of the family's potential for achieving social change is minimal. On the contrary, as McCarthy rightly observes, the family '... functions as a mediating institution, which conveys both the aims of government to the individual and the participation of individuals in projects of the state'.²⁶ Instead of questioning and transforming a society that suffers from moral decay, the 'traditional' family only sustains the current social order.

²³ John Kavanaugh, *Following the Christ in a Consumer Society* (rev. ed. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), p. 60 quoted in Rubio, 'Does family conflict with community?', p. 614.

²⁴ McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, p. 11.

²⁵ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 65.

²⁶ McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, p. 68.

Before we start looking for an alternative, another important dilemma remains to be settled by answering the following questions: How is the church related to the role of the family? Should the church lend her strengths and ministries in support of the family's grand mission of transformation of society? Should the church's commitment to family be equal to commitment to the Gospel?

2.4 The family and the church

In her judgement on American – presumably Protestant – churches, Fishburn maintains that within the communities family-related needs occupied such a central position that churches themselves became inwardly oriented.²⁷ This is a stark warning: misplaced expectations regarding family can even turn the church into a mere instrument of providing spiritual 'goods' to the family whose role then becomes that of 'religious consumer'.²⁸ The consequences of this for the understanding of the church's mission to the world could be destructive. It is valid, therefore, to re-examine how our commitments to the family correspond to the story of the Gospels and the early Church.

Even a casual reader of the Evangelists' accounts of Jesus' life will discover that he certainly held the family in high esteem. Did not he affirm marriage (Mt 10:21-22; 34; 37), bless the children (Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17), and assign a solemn role to child-caring (Mk 9:37)? Yes, but he also pointed to the temporal nature of family bonds (Mt 22:23-30; Lk 9:59-62), and actually redefined the family (Mk 3:31-35) after the criterion of *following himself*. This new institution was based on loyalty and obedience to God above all biological bonds or other ties. Clapp again uses a powerful imagery: 'Now for those who follow Jesus, the critical blood, the blood that most significantly determines their identity and character, is not the blood of the biological family. It is the blood of the Lamb.'²⁹

What about the rest of the New Testament? The famous 'household rules' are often used in affirming 'traditional family values'. Fishburn argues, nonetheless, that they are only sketching some general instructions on the nature of relationships based on equality in Christ.³⁰ The socio-historical researches show that household codes of other cultures would usually address only the male head of the family,³¹ which makes the NT

²⁷ Fishburn, *Confronting the Idolatry of Family*, p. 36.

²⁸ Lee, *Beyond Family Values*, p. 230.

²⁹ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 78. He then proceeds, in pp.79-81, to show how even Mary was first called to be a disciple, and only then his mother.

³⁰ Fishburn, *Confronting the Idolatry of Family*, p. 75.

³¹ Carolyn Osiek, 'The New Testament and the Family' (pp. 1-9 in *The Family*, Concilium 1995/4. Edited by Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth, London: SCM Press, 1995), p. 8. Osiek also maintains that

codes an exception that contributes to the human dignity of all family members *and* reveals a belonging to a new family tied by a kinship of Spirit. As for the form of the family, there are some accounts where entire households accepted baptism (Acts 11:14, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8, 1 Cor 1:16) – this confirms a social reality of a household as a basic social unit and counters our notion of both ‘traditional family’ and personal responsibility to answer the call of God. Generally, I believe, it can be reasonably argued that while the NT affirms the value of family (most probably in its socially conditioned form of that time), it nevertheless points to a higher Christian reality that supersedes the family.

Various voices from within Christian tradition speak in favour of the church’s predominance over the family. Discussing the teachings of John Chrysostom, Vigen Guroian comments that the Christian family is invited first of all to the Kingdom of God and a certain discipline is needed to accomplish that.³² Pondering over the social teaching of the Catholic Church, McCarthy concludes that Pope John Paul II understood the role of the family to be fulfilled through ‘practices of discipleship and church’.³³ As Clapp would argue, the church is God’s pivotal institution, social agent and vehicle of salvation on the earth. As such, the church is at the same time the authentic hope for the family because ‘the service to the kingdom provides the center and the sense of wholeness we otherwise lack. It crosses public-private lines and unites these supposedly separate worlds.’³⁴

Christians have often been tempted to locate the enemy outside their camp. The battle over family values is not an exception. However, the New Testament writers show little or no interest in blaming political or social systems for the evil around them. Rather, they focus on the responsibility of the church and the believers’ day-to-day dealings in the course of their ordinary life. This is why the final section of this paper will deal with the transformation of the problem, with some suggestions for families seeking the Kingdom.

3. Transformation of the problem: Christian family virtues in the restoration of human dignity

My hope is that the reader was able to conclude that ‘traditional family’ values are a rather void concept, emptied of significant content, and that the

instruction to children is actually addressing *adult* children in order to make sure their elderly (widowed) mothers are looked after.

³²Vigen Guroian, *Ethics after Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), p. 135.

³³McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, p. 124.

³⁴Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, p. 168.

cry for their preservation actually represents little more than an impotency in finding the true role of the family in the contemporary setting.³⁵ Instead of perceiving this situation as a crisis, I suggest it should be considered as an opportunity for a major change. Families have a mission to complete!³⁶ But to be able to successfully accomplish it, I propose that distinctively Christian virtues should be developed and embodied.³⁷ Due to limits on space, here I will focus on two of them.

3.1. The family and the virtue of hospitality

An opening remark must be made: to become hospitable is a dangerous change! For many of us, to create overtures in the tight boundaries of our families may awaken fears of the unknown. 'If we let down our guard', says McCarthy, 'neighbors will be entering our homes as though they belong there'.³⁸ But we must be reminded that '... to be virtuous necessarily means we must take the risk of facing trouble and dangers that might otherwise be unrecognized'.³⁹ This adventurous character of hospitality will not be experienced if the practice is reduced to an occasional providing of a meal or overnight stay for our friends. What, then, is the family's virtue of hospitality all about?

To use Miroslav Volf's metaphor, it is about an 'embrace'.⁴⁰ Instead of 'excluding' others who do not 'belong' to our family and therefore pose a threat to our emotional haven, we should open up in willingness to accept those who are different. The biblical evidence for welcoming the strangers is compelling. Clapp lists examples of inclusion of 'strangers' in Israel's society (Judg 17:12);⁴¹ of Abraham receiving promise of a son when practising hospitality to strangers (Gen 18); of Paul admonishing Romans

³⁵ Or in Stanley Hauerwas' words, '...one of the reasons we so extol the value of the family is because we are so unsure of its worth. We attempt to substitute rhetoric for substance and are thus unable to deal with the obvious shortcomings of the institution.' *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 157.

³⁶ In the words of Pope John Paul II, the family is '...called to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters through a "preferential option" for the poor and disadvantaged.' *Familiaris consortio* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1981), no. 47, quoted in Rubio, 'Does family conflict with community?', p. 601, and Clapp envisions the family as a 'mission base' in *Families at the Crossroads*, pp. 161ff.

³⁷ The term 'virtues' obviously draws on the McIntyreian concept and replaces the language of values, but because of the limits of this paper I have no space to expound on the relevance of his work and proposals for Christian ethics. However, a useful guide can be found in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, eds. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

³⁸ McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home*, p. 108.

³⁹ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 115.

⁴⁰ See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), esp. ch. 3. Although Volf uses 'embrace' primarily as a metaphor for '... the dynamic relationship between the self and the other that embrace symbolizes and enacts', I believe it can be descriptive of family and its relations to its 'other'.

⁴¹ Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, pp. 34-9.

to extend ‘hospitality to strangers’ (Rom 12:13 NRSV); of hospitality as the necessary trait of the Christian widow (1 Tim 5:10); and of a possibility that being hospitable toward strangers we may open up our homes for the Lord’s angels (Heb 13:2)!

In a multicultural and multireligious world, embracing hospitality could be a Christian virtue that surpasses and excels politically correct tolerance. Again, this is not a comfortable and romantic task because the strangeness of others may question borders we have erected and challenge our way of life.⁴² The existence of the poor can be disturbing for churches in consumerist cultures, for it questions the validity of the understanding of family as a shelter or fortress of privacy which serves to protect its members from the evils of the public realm. To protect itself, the family has to rely on consumption of goods unavailable to the poor and in so doing perpetuates its practices of privilege. It is then easy to see why charity work tackling the consequences of this injustice is mostly organised and achieved through para-church agencies. Family once again stays on the safe side of the private-public gap, and Christians can calm their conscience by giving money to charities and continue to feel safe and morally upright within their families.

The virtue of hospitality – whether it means embracing strangers who do not share our worldview, or taking care of children who are newcomers in this world, or allowing the poor to have a share in our fellowship – always acknowledges our dependence, our refusal to bow down before the cultural idol of independence and self-sufficiency. This retrieval of the comprehensive mutual dependence of all people may be something theology could offer to rebuild human dignity,⁴³ but at the same time it may help the church to decide to become, not a subculture, but an alternative culture with ‘a preference for being rather than having’.⁴⁴

3.2. The family and the virtue of presence⁴⁵

There is another plane at which the Christian family, and marriage in particular, can shape an alternative to the dominant cultural mentality and practice. Marriage today is most often based on the paradigm of contract, while Christians should build on the foundation of the covenant. Let us look at these to see how an embodied virtue of presence can contribute to

⁴² Given the complexity of this task, Clapp believes that children are strangers too and that ‘... Christians have children so we can become the kind of people who welcome strangers’. Ibid., p. 138.

⁴³ Maureen Junker-Kenny, ‘Does Dignity Need a Theological Foundation?’, pp. 57-66 in *The Discourse of Human Dignity*, Concilium 2003/2. Edited by Regina Ammich-Quinn et al (London: SCM Press, 2003), p. 64.

⁴⁴ Marciano Vidal, ‘Family Values and Ideals’, in Cahill and Mieth, *The Family*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ On a more general notion of ‘presence’ as a virtue within Christian practices and tradition, see James Wm McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp. 104-9.

human dignity.⁴⁶ In a marriage based on the contract, partners are concerned with how they get what they think they deserve. The ideal state of contractual marriage is correspondence of interests. Furthermore, the very idea of contract contains the inherent notion of possible failure of the ‘business’, and actually predicts the steps for the possible termination of the relationship.

Within the covenant, the focus is on the willingness to give. The covenant is meant for life – it presupposes purposefulness. Relationships are perceived as shapers of identity, and their influence cannot be denied even when marriage ends in divorce. Finally, family covenants are not liable to role expectations as construed from the outside because the participants are those who create the content of their covenants.

Reading the entire story of God’s dealing with his people as an account of the covenant, it may easily be argued that all relationships within the family should be modelled on this example. This is substantially different from the blind insistence on preserving the institution of the family *per se*, especially today when so many are suspicious of any form of family commitment. Thus, Christian families have the potential to be role-models, not so much with the purpose of showing what family should look like, but as a witness to a major story of God’s covenant with his people which infuses meaning into all our relationships. The main form of this witness is the virtue of presence – ‘...being one’s self for someone else; ... refusing the temptation to withdraw mentally and emotionally...’⁴⁷ This presence is the vital feature in the emerging postmodern world, in which people could not care less about the words of profession, denominational differences and doctrinal hair splitting; they are desperate to see someone *living* the truth. In our societies, crippled by alienation and avoidance, being there for others may help to bridge the gap between the private and the public, to focus Christian witness on real life issues, and to identify the family as a promoter of human dignity.

Conclusion

A certain journey has been travelled in this paper. The discussion started with the notion of ‘family values’, but we discovered that the real issue is the ‘role of the family’. In looking for a solution, we switched to the language of virtues. Here are the findings of the journey.

⁴⁶ Most of the insights in this paragraph draw from Diana Garland’s discussion in *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 334-42.

⁴⁷ McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 106.

The disturbance of 'traditional family values' in many societies today can be seen not only as a sign of a deep moral crisis but as an indicator of the need to re-evaluate the notion of 'traditional' family, profoundly conditioned by modern capitalistic and consumerist presuppositions. After a closer examination, the current understanding of the role of the family shows it to be inadequate and deficient. However, the Christian response is to be formulated along the lines of the church which must, in Hauerwas' terms, '... stand as an institution that claims a loyalty and significance beyond that of the family. Only when such an institution exists can we have the freedom to take the risk to form and live in families.'⁴⁸ The church should turn to its primary mission and stop acting and believing as if the family is supposed 'to save the world'. Then the church can again become free to be a community formed by a tradition in which families can share if they take care to embody concrete and contextual virtues such as hospitality and presence. Only then will the family be able to look to the future, not with the prospect of extinction, but with the hope of assuming the role of a messenger of the Kingdom that can already, to use the insight of John Howard Yoder, be foretasted within and through the church.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p. 168.

⁴⁹ John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 228.

Book Reviews

John E. Colwell

The Rhythm of Doctrine: A Liturgical Sketch of Christian Faith and Faithfulness

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007, 135 pp.

I am delighted to review and commend this book by my friend and colleague John Colwell. The editor-in-chief of the *Christianity Today* Media Group, David Neff, who has devoted considerable space to enthusiastic comment on this book, noted that John Colwell teaches at Spurgeon's College in London. Knowing this was a Baptist institution, he wondered what a Baptist was doing organising his theology around the liturgical calendar. I share David Neff's enthusiasm for the book, but not his surprise that Baptists might be interested in the seasons of the church year. He would find the same at IBTS, Prague.

However, this book does represent a new and creative venture in the way it organises theology around the church year. In its innovative approach it parallels the theological volumes by another Baptist, James W. McClendon, which began with ethics. It has also been shaped by personal experience, and it is far removed from any attempt to do something clever. John Colwell writes: 'More than any other factor, it was the experience of wrestling with the crushing darkness of clinical depression that drew me to a more formal devotional life: when you really cannot pray yourself, when every form of "felt" experience has fled, when you are despairing of yourself and despairing of God, then the prayers of others become precious. ... I discovered the prayers of the Church...'.

There is rich Christian theology in the chapters of this volume – 'The One Who Comes', 'The One Who Takes Our Humanity', 'The One Who is Revealed', 'The One Who Journeys To The Cross', 'The One Who Lives And Reigns', 'The One Who Indwells And Transforms', and 'The One Who Invites Us Into Communion'. There is also engagement with the Jewish context in which God revealed himself in Jesus. The whole reading of scripture that takes place here is deeply rooted in and shaped by that story. The chapters also link theology to ethics: each season is connected to a theological virtue.

E. Glenn Hinson and Robert Webber, both of whom have done much to encourage Baptists to draw from the rich traditions of the Church, speak in praise of this volume, Webber commenting that it 'represents the cutting edge of work being done in worship and theology'. This book leads not only to deeper knowledge of God, but also to heartfelt worship.

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John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds

A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700

Brill, Leiden, 2007, 574 pp.

This substantial work, drawing together noted authors in the field of early Anabaptism – Snyder, Goertz, Rothkegel and Rempel – explores German, Swiss, Moravian and Silesian Anabaptist communities over 180 years. Major figures amongst the ‘anabaptist’ spiritualist experiences of the 16th and 17th centuries such as Karlstadt, Schwenckfeld, Marpeck and Menno are commented on and chapters are devoted to important issues including gender roles, literature, hymnody and martyrdom. The volume focuses on what we might term the ‘Germanic’ lands and does not deal with France, Italy, England and Poland.

The book is timely within the approach of fruitful dialogue amongst Anabaptist scholars, given the renewed interest in the radical reformation. The scholarship is of a high standard, though coming from different perspectives. This must immediately be placed on the course reader list of any institution taking reformation and radical reformation studies seriously. The style of each of the thirteen chapters is to ‘offer an interpretive overview of a central theme in Anabaptist or Spiritualist historiography’, as Roth says in his Foreword, but the authors go beyond that to looking at the state of contemporary scholarship in the particular field, then offering comments on the possible direction of future research in their area.

The chapters are inevitably somewhat different in style, given the variety and background of the authors, but as all are specialists in their particular field the quality of the history and the analysis is high. This book also offers some helpful methods to aid the student. So, in his chapter on Moravia and Silesia, Rothkegel uses the German form of names of towns, such as Nikolsberg, Austerlitz, Znaim and Sabatisch, but on first use he always provides the Slavic name (the contemporary name) Mikulov, Slavkov u Brna, Znojmo and Sobotište. It is this sort of detail and care for the reader which is not common in earlier writings and which enhances the value of this volume to those not familiar with the geography of Europe in the 1600s. Rothkegel benefits from access to previously closed State archives in Bohemia, helping us to better understand the variety of communities existing near to the River March (Morava).

Within this volume we are reminded of the variety and complexity of those early anabaptist and spiritualist communities. The ‘swordbearers’ of Münster and Mikulov are set alongside the peace loving Menno, and we are drawn towards communities engaged in a radicalized rejection of the ecclesiastical, social and political status quo. The research and debate expounded in this volume keep open the continuing reflection as to whether

we can easily describe and circumscribe the one radical reformation as George Huntston Williams does, or is there so much variety in the anabaptist and spiritualist gathering groups that we can only claim that these intentional communities presented a challenge to the rulers of the day that diversity in ecclesial life had to be accepted within their realms. Amongst these gathering and vibrant nonconformist communities, rich in insights and radicalized community life, new ways of being church demanded attention and, in the end, could not be ignored.

The chapter on gender roles and perspectives by Sigrun Haude attempts to unravel the perplexing question of how far women were able to exercise spiritual leadership within Radical Reformation communities compared to the Roman Catholic and Magisterial Reformation worlds. As always, the evidence is different from one community to another, but certainly the testimony of those who were martyred for their faith is compelling and the determination of many to 'bear witness' is very powerful. Recent studies begin to uncover Anabaptist women who were placed in the position of being revolutionaries because of the impact of the ideas and understanding of the Gospel within the communities and because they were subject, like the males in their communities, to persecution, torture and death. Male members of those same communities did not always see the outcome of the impact of their teachings and discipleship on the women gathering with them.

This volume is to be highly commended for bringing together a series of fascinating essays by leaders in their field. For those interested in the insights to be drawn from the radical reformers for the life of the gathering churches of Christ today, there is much here on which to ponder.

Keith G Jones, Rector, IBTS, Prague



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